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ABSTRACT

Intended for newspaper managing editors, this collection of articles includes the following topics and authors: religion coverage, by Robert Bentley; arts and entertainment reviews, by Larry Fuller; restaurant reviews, by Mary Ann Thompson; getting kids to read newspapers, by Anita Sama; reaching teen readers, by Jane Bennett; and lifestyle sections, by Mike Finney. (EL)

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MODERN LIVING

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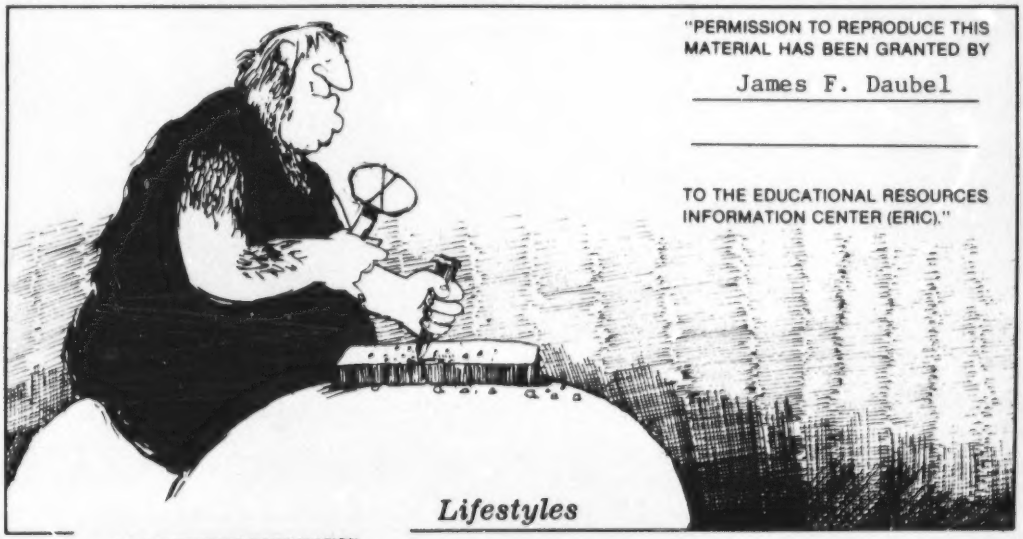
The 1983 Final Report of the Modern Living Committee

ED260414

Criticism and reviews

Young readers



Lifestyles

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Production Editor: Ray Pitlyk, features editor, Star-Gazette Sunday Telegram, Elmira N.Y.
Artist: Craig Palmer, editorial artist, Star-Gazette Sunday Telegram, Elmira, N.Y.

Seeing the light on religious

On most papers religion coverage is barely routine, but it doesn't have to be that way.

By ROBERT BENTLEY
Managing Editor
The Bakersfield Californian

Check which of the following statements are true:

"Religion is consistently the weakest part of a newspaper's coverage."

"We're very badly out of touch with our readers in this area."

"We don't understand the impact it has on most lives."

"We're reasonably attuned to the ethnic and sexual sensitivites, but not religious ones."

"Very few of us are making a commitment."

"We do the obligatory; nothing more."

"We're improving, but not fast enough to suit our readers."

"At least we recognize the problem. That's a start."

All of the above. All are correct, according to a sampling of APME editors from the southern buckle on the Bible Belt to naughty San Francisco who were questioned on their papers' and the industry's religion coverage.

Most conceded their papers were providing little more than traditional coverage — pulpit notes, church calendars, an occasional pastor profile or religious feature written by pedestrian reporters, the Billy Graham, Mike McManus or other syndicated columns wrapped around the Saturday church ads, all written or edited on a part-time basis — and sometimes under duress.

Few could cite successes on their papers or those of others.

Why?

"Many of our newsrooms are staffed by young liberal hotshots — same as we were — who think religion coverage is uncool," ventures executive edtor Sanders LaMont of the *Modesto Bee*. "This colors our coverage."

news coverage

"It's a very sensitive area and it's critical that it be done right," adds Rick Tuttle, executive editor of the *Elmira Star-Gazette* and *Sunday Telegram*. "Many of us get swamped with other daily problems and say 'God, I don't need this.'"

"We know it's a weak area but we give a higher priority to our other shortcomings . . . like business coverage and articles about raising kids," says Bill Fuller, managing editor of the *Tallahassee Democrat*.

"It doesn't pay off in ad revenue," quips managing editor Bill Cento, whose solid religion coverage in the *St. Paul Dispatch* tempers his cynical response.

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Editors may find that their hair shirts fit slightly more comfortably by studying the 67-market research of Burgoon, Co., Inc., which contends that only 11 percent of newspaper readers read religion news some or all of the time.

But be wary, warns Mike Burgoon. "These are very committed readers . . . I'd be careful not to do less than you're doing now. Besides, it may well be that you're attracting only 11 percent because you're doing a poor job. I find most religion pages deadly-looking and horribly written."

Editor George Blake, who believes his *Cincinnati Enquirer's* coverage is "about right," flew into the face of Burgoon's warning recently and cut Billy Graham's column to once a week without reader complaint. The lack of gripes, though, may be due to what Blake calls his "strongly Catholic" readership.

Do's and Don't's on religion coverage

During interviews with the editors, a list of do's and don't's emerged for improved religion coverage.

DO'S

► Develop a mindset to make the commitment. Otherwise it will never happen.

► Establish religion as an important, hard-news aand feature-rich beat.

► Staff it with respected, proven reporters.

► Poll readers and staffers to see how many of them attend church and are interested in religion news. ("The percentage difference may send an editor into apoplexy.")

► Tap into ministerial societies for contacts, ideas and even contributions.

► Cover religion as it affects issues and lifestyles — not just what is believed or preached.

► Organized coverage and clean up religion pages. ("It's amazing what an improvement a little housekeeping will make.")

DON'T'S

► Don't assign weak sisters (or brothers) who have bombed out on every other beat to religion. It you later decide to upgrade coverage, a stigma will have been attached to the beat.

► It's desirable to assign reporters who are interested in religion, but don't try to disguise evangelists as reporters. Also, be wary of religiously-involved staff members who may not be able to see beyond their own church, denomination or faith, or who may be unable to report objectively because of their closeness with the subject.

► If minister contributions are used, don't let them degenerate into sermons.

► Don't let any aspect of religious faith be presented as fact.

► Don't let the journalistic appeal of unusual, offbeat or downright nutty aspects of religion overshadow reader desires for coverage of the more traditional ones.

► Don't just pray when mishandling of sensitive issues sparks the inevitable firestorm. Correct the misdeeds, ask for forgiveness by the offended (scriptural references on the virtues of such may be helpful), and do penance by leading an exemplary life — at least until the heat dies down.

However, in the shadow of Graham's headquarters, the *Charlotte Observer* commits to the religion beat a full-time writer who doesn't hesitate to wade into the fray with enterprise and investigative reporting.

"At times the true believers get outraged and accuse us of attacks on God," says managing editor Mark Ethridge, III, "but balanced and thorough religion coverage offsets much of the criticism."

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Managing editor Eddie Sears of the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* takes a two-pronged approach. "We have a reporter who tackles the trend stuff and project pieces, and another who compiles the more traditional material for the Saturday pages."

The recent merger of his news staffs has enabled both reporters to address religion on "About three-fourths full-time basis," Sears says, "but we realize we still have a way to go. We still haven't dug into some peripheral religion stories they way we should . . . the black churches, for instance, which have tremendous influence on members' lives."

The *Houston Chronicle* was an early pace-setter in religion coverage, says managing editor Don Pickels, and it's paid off. The *Chronicle* employs two full-time religion staffers — one veteran editor recruited cut of a seminary — who produce a complete weekly section and provide Page One stories with regularity.

"Religion is big business here, not pap," Pickels says, "and we cover it as an important hard-news beat." The *Chronicle* occasionally draws from the rest of the staff for specialized religion-related articles — such as the critic who reviewed church music (and lived to tell about it).

Across the Lone Star state, *El Paso Times* co-managing editor John Moore says he is being "forced" to expand beyond traditional religion page coverage

by the facts that churches — especially Catholic churches — are becoming increasingly involved in hard news and lifestyle areas, such as labor, politics and social services. "We handle it as best we can with a half-time religion reporter and staff contributions," Moore says, "but I'm still not satisfied that we're doing the job the way it should be done."

Cento's research shows that more than half his readers attend church regularly — "a helluva lot more than go to Viking games" — and a far greater percentage than his staffers. This means the paper has to make a compensating effort, which he does with a full-time religion reporter — a former minister — staff contributions, and a Saturday church section.

The ex-minister was "groomed carefully," Cento says, and his solid stories make Page One and the daily news pages frequently.

Despite the presence of a hard-hitting religion reporter with sound daily coverage and interesting weekend pages, managing editor Dave Halvorsen wondered if his *San Francisco Examiner* was accurately reflecting religion as a formidable enough part of the Bay area's "narcissistic lifestyle."

To see, the *Examiner* compiled an exhaustive fact-filled and colorful series, "What We Believe," which — to the dismay of some religious leaders — showed the area to be far less concerned than most with organized, traditional religion.

"It further convinced us, though, that there are a lot of important, readable religious and religion-related stories out there," Halvorsen says, "both in the traditional and exotic aspects of the beat."

Reviewers get no raves from arts, theater groups

By LARRY FULLER
Publisher
Sioux Falls Argus Leader

Newspaper people don't think that theater folk understand their role as unbiased reporters trying to communicate honest feelings to the reader.

Theater people are equally concerned about the qualifications of a reviewer and the lack of commitment by most newspapers to the arts/entertainment coverage, especially theater.

Those were the most frequent reactions to a survey of 200 editors and 200 members of the American Theater Association (ATA) last June.

Thirty-four (17 percent) of the theater people responded to the questionnaire and 56 newspapers (28 percent). That's a fairly good response for mailed questionnaires, and while it may not be scientific, the consistency of responses do offer some trends worth listening to, both for editors and theater people.

Too often editors and theater people are saying the same thing — "You don't understand what we're trying to do."

If there is a bottom line from what the survey told us, it is that there is frustration on both sides and a desire for more communication.

"We serve our readers, not the individual theater groups," wrote an editor of a large Washington state paper. "You get upset if we give you a negative review but also if we don't review you at all. In other words, 'Sure you can review us, just don't write anything unfavorable.' "

"Theater criticism is an art," wrote the frustrated director of a college theater in a smaller Ohio city. "Theater organizations really rise and fall depending on the size of the audience. When local media fail to cover events in the theater, many remain unaware."

The survey produced a fascinating outpouring of thoughts from both newspaper and theater people.

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Among the theater people, nearly 70 percent said their performances are regularly reviewed by a newspaper and 78 percent of them think those reviews have been fair. A vast majority — 88 percent — felt the reviewer understood the play.

Most of the frustration over coverage came from smaller cities where the newspaper usually has a small staff and in suburbs of large cities where performances aren't covered either by the metros or the local weekly or daily.

"Our local newspaper says it can't waste the money to have only a reviewer on the staff, so local performing groups locate their own reviewers, usually college faculty or pros in the field," wrote a designer and director from Maryland.

On the fairness question, the director of a Texas community theater said: "Whether or not a critic loves a given production or hates it is not of vital importance. What IS of vital importance is that our productions are evaluated by responsible, thoughtful, practiced reviewers who care about the theater as an institution and care about the artistic growth (or non-growth) of specific organizations and about the growth of a discerning audience.
and about the growth of a discerning audience.

Several theater people also said the critics often may understand the plot, but not the play itself.

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In terms of qualifications for a theater critic, the theater and newpaper people were in general agreement on the need for knowledge of theater and the arts in general. Theater people tended to emphasize the requirement for more formal training and newspaper people placed a stronger emphasis on writing skills.

"If a person occupies a seat, he or she is qualified to be a reviewer," wrote the editor of a mid-sized Minnesota newspaper.

"My concern is creditibility and the appearance of being fair," said the managing editor of a Manitoba newspaper.

"Some reviewers have too little training; there's a crying need for help in this area," said the editor of a large Oklahoma area.

By the way, if the that editor is looking for help, most theater people are more than willing to provide it. Theater people often pleaded for the reviewer to read the play first and to talk to the director in advance about what he or she is trying to accomplish.

Said the general manager of a Kansas community theater: "A reviewer should have a first-hand background in the performing arts, not just 'journalism.' " A California director said that in larger cities, reviewers are usually competent; in smaller cities, much less so," a reflection of the fact that on smaller papers, reviewing is often an added, usually minor, responsibility.

In discussing the roie of a reviewer with friends in the theater, I was struck by how often they urged that audience reactions be considered. Among theater people answering the questionnaire, 84 percent felt audience reaction should be considered. Others were widely divided whether critics and audiences are in agreement and even if they should be.

Most reviewers, though, said they rarely consider audience reaction and noted that on opening night, when they usually review, the audience was, in the words of one editor, filled with husbands, wives, relatives, friends and lovers of the actors.

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In most cases, theater people feel that there is more community interest in the arts and entertainment than is reflected in the newspaper's commitment to staffing and space. That's an observation often shared by the critics, too, who note the competition for the usually tight news space allocation.

Several theater people said that arts

Reviews cause frustration on both sides

The committee's survey on arts and entertainment reviews asked editors to "send a message" to the theater people. And the ATA members were given the same opportunity for the editors.

What the answers seemed to show was a frustration on both sides, a feeling that neither really understands the goals, mission or the jobs of the other.

THE EDITORS

From the arts editor of a medium-sized New York daily: "You can't have your cake and eat it, too. If you are committed to quality, then so are we at the newspaper. We are critics of your work and praise it when it deserves it. And, in the same way that we try to keep you honest, you should try to keep us honest. A healthy interchange never hurts anyone."

From the features editor of a Vermont paper: "Please accept that we are a newspaper, not a public relations agency. We cover the arts the way the news department covers city hall: As a beat."

From a Massachussets arts editor: "Don't expect the newspapers to do your job for you. If a show is bad, it's your fault, not the reviewers. If, however, you believe you are being unfairly treated, you should call this to the attention of the editors in the strongest possible terms."

From a managing editor in Manitoba: "Don't treat a reporter or reviewer with contempt or hostility. Dumb questions come from people who don't know and at least acknowledged this by trying to find an answer."

The critic of a large Iowa newspaper: "If you ask to be reviewed, don't expect a publicity puff. Remember, that a review is written to a space maximum and against a usually atrocious deadline."

Many of the newspaper people want theater folk to do a better job of keeping them informed, as indicated by these quotes."

"Be a professional in your approach to the media as you are in your approach to theater; don't assign your bookkeeper to do your media relations."

Or: "Keep in mind the editorial side of the newspaper. We're looking for unique story ideas and angles."

Or: "Be thoughtful in giving advance notice of plays. Meet deadlines and you'll get better coverage.

THE THEATER PEOPLE

From New Mexico: "Get critics who are in this to improve their community, not their self image and who are open-minded enough to judge a piece on its own merits."

From Alabama: "Don't have your sports or obit person start doing reviews or critism without any training in what the heck the art form is. Allow them a little time and money to learn."

From Kansas: "Get critics who not only understand theater but who can write well and creatively, rather than recounting the scene synopsis and story line."

From Texas: "Small theaters are dying all over the country. They need help to spread the word about their plight. Please provide room for their plea . . . free of charge."

From another Texas City: "You have, whether you like it or not, a great deal of control over the health and growth of the arts in your community. With the control goes a great deal of responsibility."

And, finally, from Ohio: Theater criticism is an art. Theater organizations really rise and fall depending on the size of the audience. When local media fail to cover events in the theater, many remain unaware."

and entertainment takes far too much a backseat to sports. Wrote one director and designer from Maryland: "Wake up. Patrons of the arts patronize the same advertisers in your paper that sports fanciers do. Arts fans deserve the same amount of news and reviews as sports fans. One day they may tell you so by

boycotting your advertisements." That same director pulled out her ruler and measured that night's paper. The results: national news, 218 inches, including 100 inches of human interest; international news, 41 inches; local news, 210 inches, including weather; state news, 51 inches; sports news, 420 inches; and arts news, 18 inches, "including a news service article on the J.P. Getty Museum in L.A., 3,000 miles away."

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We also asked whether the newspaper should be an advocate of the arts, a question that was intended to determine whether the newspaper was expected to support the arts beyond normal reporting and reviewing. 87 percent of the theater people agreed that newspapers should be an advocate, and 63 percent of the newspaper people.

A Montana director said that if a newspaper wants to be a part of the community, it had better promote it." From Oklahoma came the comment that, "It is imperative to the success of the arts for a newspaper to play the promotional and advocacy role above the condescension role it plays. In other words, the newspaper acts like they are doing us a favor to run their coverage."

But the arts and entertainment editor of a Massachusetts paper said that, "News columns should not promote. However, if we do our jobs well, the public will be very aware of what entertainment is available."

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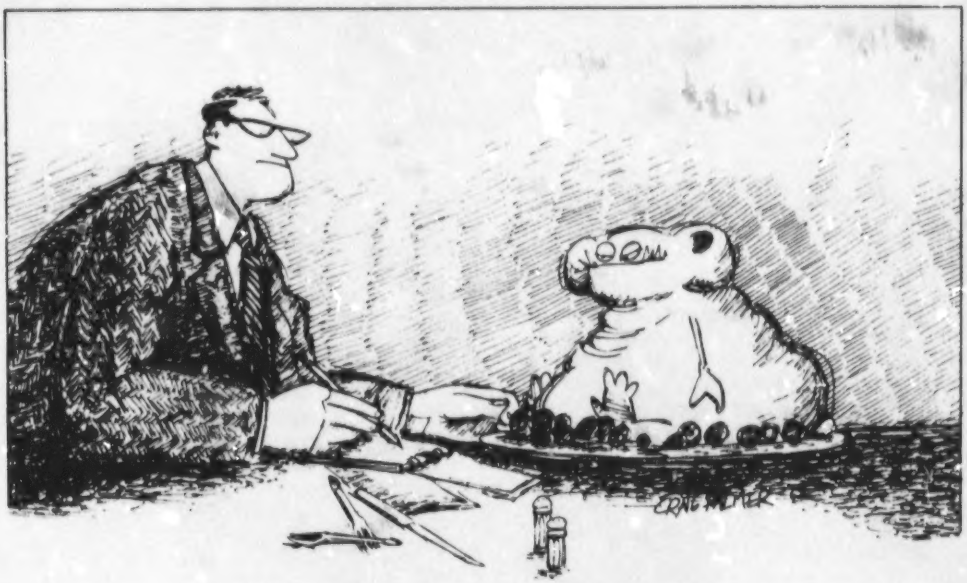
What did I hear from all of this?

First, there is not a very good apreciation between newspaper and theater people of the expectations of each others role, especially in the reviewing and promotional areas.

In newspapers, we expect there may be a certain gulf of skepticism between reporters and sources, whether the reporter is covering city hall or sports or the theater. We see ourselves as the readers representative more than the advocate for the area we are covering and that's probably where some of the difference in views of our roles comes. However, there should be no compromising of the basic journalistic principles of accuracy and fairplay in serving the reader.

Second, the director and the critic may be talking, but sometimes they aren't communicating very well. But I heard serious and caring people on both sides who offer the message that they are willing to listen and to learn. Both sides do have different jobs and roles but there is an underlying message of care from both.

I especially like the message from a veteran Tennessee critic who said: "Journalists are professionals also and they can and will be of tremendous help if you will allow them to."



"My entree was much too rare."

Some food for thought on restaurant reviews

By MARY ANN THOMPSON
Features Project Coordinator
Springfield Newspapers

The trend was well established early on.

A sampling of newspaper editors from throughout the United States found they are definitley in favor of keeping their readerships informed about restaurants in their cities.

And not simply keeping them informed about such things as location, atmosphere, pricing and types of food available. They want their readers to know if they're getting their money's worth, both in quality of food and service. And in order to do this, editors were almost unanimous in their opinions that the information should be presented as a review or critique, just as they would be told about a movie or play, and not as a profile.

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"We do other reviews and endorse political candidates. The newspaper has a role to recommend," an editor for the *Jackson Daily News* in Jackson, Miss., said. Others ranked the reviews as part of their consumer service, to have their reviewers playing the consumer role, then telling people what to expect.

Newspapers selected for the APME study represented North, East, South and West, the coasts and mid-America. Circulations ranged from 60,000 to 550,000. Both morning and evening dailies were contacted.

Findings showed that most reviews were published in the weekend or calendar sections near the end of the week.

One or two were published in Sunday entertainment sections.

Three of those contacted had previously done reviews but had stopped. In one case, after publishing reviews for four years, it was concluded they were becoming repetitious both in writing and coverage. The other two representative newspapers had discontinued reviews because of staffing problems. One of the three editors said that when the reviews were started again they would be divided among present staff members and would continue to be presented as critiques. Another has recently started restaurant features again, this time switching to a profile-type story including a recipe. The third apparently has no plans to resume such a feature at this time.

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The *Binghamton Press* in Binghamton, N.Y., has neither a review nor a profile, but a feature called "Specialty of the House," with a reader participation format. Readers write the newspaper asking for a specific recipe from a specific restuarant; the paper in turn acquires the recipe and publishes it, with no comment on the restaurant.

All agreed that integrity is of utmost importance in reviewing a restaurant. None indicated any conflict with advertising departments concerning the reviews. Editors also were unanimous in their feeling that visits to the restaurants be unannounced and that reviewers remain anonymous during the visit. Usually the reviewer visits a restaurant more than once before a review is published, particularly if the review is to be negative.

In one case cited from the *St. Paul Pioneer Press/Dispatch* two visits were made by the reviewer, followed by visits by a supervising editor, the assistant managing editor and managing editor before the negative review was printed.

The reviews are serious business. "There's an awful lot to take into consideration," Kay Jarvis-Promop, reviewer for the San Diego Tribune, said. Experience and community response have told them the reviews do have an impact. But nobody is trying to run an establishment out of business, only to present an objective assessment of it, the editors interviewed for this study agreed.

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There were varied opinions concerning qualifications of reviewers.

One features editor said, "We have about seven people on the staff who do the reviews. They're reporters, that's all. They don't pretend to be experts. It's an ordinary dining experience anyone else might encounter. We make it clear that it's one person's opinion. The reviewers consider themselves the dining public and react in much the same way other non-experts would. Obviously, I don't believe the reviewers have to be experts."

Most other papers confined their review writing to one writer and in a few cases to two. Those editors and reviewers were of the impression that reviewers do need some degree of expertise, and one specifically pointed out the importance of using one person for consistancy for the reader to know where the reviewer stands.

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Donn Fry, arts and entertainment editor for the *Seattle Times*, Seattle, Wash., described a restaurant reviewer as a columnist who is interested in food and restaurants. "He's witty and a knowledgeable writer on food and restaurants. He does a popular and readable critique. Readers can learn about the restaurant and have a laugh at the same time," he said.

Joe Pollock, reviewer for the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, St. Louis, Mo., often accompanies his critiques with a statement about his personal tastes so readers understand that they need to take that into consideration.

Two other observations from reviewers:

Robert Tolf, a freelancer who writes restaurant reviews for the *Fort Lauderdale News*, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., said, "I don't think anyone could write a review. It requires something that can't be defined, like palate. And it requires experience. There are people who know about food who can't write, and good writers who don't know about food."

And from Anthony Spinazzola of the *Boston Globe:* "I have an impression now about reviewing that I didn't when I first started. I think it would be much better if the reviewer were footloose and fancy free and out on the town every night. It's very difficult to go to a place with the specific object of doing a review. There's a better sense of the place if you just drop in and get ideas."

Getting kids to read the paper

Pennywhistle Press succeeds with the motto: "Our readers aren't dumb, they're just young."

By ANITA SAMA
Editor, Pennywhistle Press

"Dear Company," one letter began, "I think you put a lot of work in the paper...it's good for me and it's fun too...I think it's a good idea to make the *Pennywhistle Press* so you'll get us kids' attention."

Over 37,000 letters have accompanied this one since July 1961 when *Pennywhistle Press*, the Gannett Company's weekly children's supplement, first appeared.

Gannett had sensed a need for regular material aimed at the elementary school age. It was a way to introduce newspapers early as sources of entertainment and information and establish newspapers as a lifetime habit.

The experiment was begun in tabloid form in just three newspapers after a few planning sessions and much head-scratching.

A recent Simmons Market Research Bureau study now puts the supplement in almost 40 papers (including two-non Gannett properties which purchase *Pennywhistle Press* through syndication).

But numbers don't even begin to tell the *Pennywhistle* story. Those thousands of letters include poems, valentines and pictures of their pets. Sometimes the envelopes are smudgy masterpieces of just-learned printing — one was carefully

sealed with a Band-aid. One came in Braille.

We seem to have struck a special chord with *Pennywhistle*. Our style tries to be neither syrupy and patronizing nor dry and preachy. When "regular adult" reporters from around the Gannett group who contribute to *Pennywhistle's* pages ask how to write for kids, we tell them our motto is: "Our readers aren't dumb, they're just young."

We construct each issue around a theme — puppets, families, zoos, moving, — anything that relates to children and the special things that touch their lives. The features, puzzles, fiction and fillers are designed to strike a balance between humor and fact, graphic sophistrication and functional simplicity.

Like any good newspaper we have tried to provide a balance for our readers — news, features and fun. To do this we rebuilt the idea of a children's magazine from the ground up. Our writing is tight, our graphics clean and our choice of stories varied. Even the language has been re-invented —pared down and simplified.

Our signature characters, bumbling Manual and the smart-aleck Footnotes, exist to explain difficult words or complicated background.

Reader participation, we find, is a cornerstone of our popularity with young readers. We invite it and they know it. Besides letters indicating their interest in *Pennywhistle* as a separate entity, it's evident there is a heightened awareness of the local newspaper of which *Pennywhistle* is a part.

The care in selection and editing has been well repaid. Reader loyalty shines through in the letters still pouring in at the rate of over 300 a week. Expert recongnition has come from The Educational Press Association, the International Reading Association and the Society of Newspaper Design.

But it's not all a bed of lollipops. If *Pennywhistle* goofs, (what paper doesn't occasionally,) we are inundated with complaints about the correct date of the world series or the exact name of Mr. T's hairstyle. For journalists, the quest for accuracy comes with the territory, but somehow, in dealing with children, it seems even more crucial. Besides getting children to read newspaper and enjoy them, we are trying to build a lifelong trust of the written word.

We constantly must face tough concepts with the limited tools of understanding children possess. How do you handle the nuclear threat so an eight-year-old will understand yet not be terrorized? On what level must the subjects of drugs or alchol be approached so we live up to our informative duties, yet not intrude on a parent's prerogative for teaching their child? These are not easy decisions as we try to tackle news stories and topical features.

Also it's a weekly challenge to stay as fresh as the bright minds we reach. We read educators' treatises and try out hiccup cures. We've scheduled focus groups and fumbled with instructions to make birthday hats.

Geographically we're biting off a large chunk. Our readers live in Utica, New York, Jackson, Mississippi, Agana, Guam and points between. *Pennywhistle* tries to link those places and the children in them.

In a sense, *Pennywhistle Press* trees to be a centralized, local newspaper for the small town which is American childhood. And, along the way, this service to young readers also represents newspapers' committment to their own futures.

Pennywhistle Press facts

Results of the Simmons Market Research Bureau study:

- 1,799,577 readers aged 6 to 12 years old with an average age of 9.4.
- 43.7% of their parents — 786,415 adults. That's 2,585,992 million.
- Over 60 percent of kids surveyed who do not currently receive *Pennywhistle Press* in their newspapers would like to.
- Current readers spend an average of 31.2 minutes reading each 8-page issue. The industry average for a whole newspaper is only 44 minutes.
- The survey showed *Pennywhistle* readers save each issue an average of 13.9 days. The shelf-life of adult papers — well, everyone in the business knows what lines birdcages.

Reaching teen readers requires imagination

By JANE BENNETT
Assistant Managing Editor/Projects
Springfield News-Leader

Newspapers from Philadelphia to Seattle are including news, columns and comics especially for teenage readers, but the efforts vary widely.

The extent of the newspapers' efforts to reach teenagers varies from integration of stories in the regular news and feature columns to weekly tabloid sections.

Many newspapers simply run general stories that they hope will appeal to both adolescent and adult readers. Some have more ambitious projects. The lagging economy affected efforts on many papers when advertising linage dropped and forced an over-all tightening of news space. In many cases the first columns cut involved teen news pages or sections.

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Carole Smith, editor of the *Phoenix Gazette's* "Teen Gazette" in Arizona, said that for 27 years the *Gazette* has devoted considerable space to teen news but changed its teen news format this year.

"Our angle has been for teens and by teens," she said. "Up until this year we gave them eight tabloid pages every Saturday during the school year. Now we have changed it into broadsheet pages."

"Teen Gazette" is published each Tuesday on two broadsheet pages with no advertising, "just solid teen news," said Glenn Taylor, *Phoenix Gazette* assistant managing editor.

"We find what they write about teen-

aged activities is read by their contemporaries," Ms. Smith said.

Students write about school issues rather than planned events. Stories included a controversy over banning students from school when they wear T-shirts with sexy slogans, teen suicide, and what declining enrollment and tight finances mean to school curriculum.

A good student story can make the front page of the newspaper.

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Jim Davis, features editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, said the newspaper has regular columns on video games, video cassettes and computers.

"We think that is one of the highest interests of many teenagers," he said.

On July 4, the newspaper started regularly noting the heavy plays on MTV (Music Television).

"If it were not for the teenagers, there would not be enough interest to justify the expense. We run this for teen-agers, he said. "We're very concerned about teen readers, but essentially we think teenaged readers are not different from other readers."

The newspaper run reviews of popular and rock music and tries to handle the groups that are predominately teen-oriented the same way that an adult-oriented group is handled.

"We think teeangers respond to that," Davis said.

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Dave Short, a features writer with the *Independent Record* of Helena, Mont., oversees a weekly eight-page staff-written tabloid aimed at students. Four pages of "Upbeat" are devoted to high school students and four pages are for younger pupils.

"We deal with issues and not necessarily the things you would find in the student newspapers we have here."

The newspaper has placed boxes in the schools for story suggestions as well as for responses to a weekly poll on a topical issue. The poll is a basis for a story each week.

"They are always welcome to give ideas in the suggestion box, but we don't get a lot of ideas. We do get a good response to our polls," Short said.

The two high schools in Helena have representatives on a teen panel that meets with the newspaper's "Upbeat" editor/writer and talks about issues. Stories also come from the panel's discussions. Panel members rotate monthly. "We tried to stay outside the realm of cliques," Short said.

He said he finds the lack of advertising support baffling because of the large teen market.

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A lack of interest among its target readership caused *The Columbian* of Van-

Finding out what teens read

One way to find out what teenagers will read in a newspaper is to ask them point-blank.

That was the approached selected by the editors of the *Springfield, Mo., News-Leader* last summer while planning a Sunday magazine for teenagers.

Using pizza and soft drinks as bait, the editors sat down with six students ranging in age from 13 to 18.

The students — from an eighth grader to a 1983 high school graduate — were asked what they thought Springfield teenagers would find interesting in a magazine written for them.

The results:

► They thought stories on tanning, weight control and over-all fitness would be well read.

► They wanted interviews with local musical groups, tips on where to have inexpensive dates and what goes on at midnight movies.

► They wanted practical information about what scholarships were available, details about schools to help them choose colleges and stories about career opportunities.

► They wanted financial stories. Where to find jobs in the local economy ranked high.

Instead of stories concentrating on football, baseball and basketball, these students were more interested in alternative sports or activities they could do by themselves. They suggested speed skating, motorcross racing and cycling.

couver, Wash., to drop its student-written weekly broadsheet page about a year ago, said Gregg Harrington, city editor.

"If we had a halfway decent readership, we would not have dropped it," he said. "The feedback we were able to get from teenagers we solicited as well as from teachers was ho hum and (the page) was not looked at in the high schools."

Now the newspaper tries to keep teenagers' news, good and bad, in the regular news pages in staff-written stories. This spring the newspaper listed all high school graduates and published photographs of the two top-ranking boy and girl, in each of the high schools in the county.

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The *Dallas Times-Herald* places its teen emphasis on rock and other forms of popular music with a full-time rock music critic.

"I think the very definite emphasis we place on rock music is something that would appeal as much as anything to younger readers," said Larry Warner, who joined the *Times-Herald* as features editor last November. "We cover entertainment exhaustively but that would include everything from rock clubs to rock music to fine arts.

"We have no special section or columns aimed at teenaged readers. I'm not saying we shouldn't have, but we just bought a comic strip (Drabble) that has a strong appeal to the adolescent. We haven't spent a lot of time thinking about the teenaged reader other than they are a tremendous market for rock music."

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The *Louisville Times*of Louisville, Ky. publishes "Scene Magazine," a tabloid that varies from 36 to 44 pages and is printed ROP for Saturday distribution.

"Scene's" exceptional street sales makes Saturday the biggest publication day for *The Times*, an afternoon newspaper, Nelson said. Many people subscribe only to the Saturday newspaper.

Scene focuses on leisure-time activities from movies, plays, concerts, television, restaurants, night life and gardening to high tech, astrology and automobiles. The magazine includes a cover story on a subject of general interest and, depending on advertising, may have a secondary general interest story.

The newspaper also has a staff-written question and answer column especially for teenaged readers who ask questions about their problems.

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A syndicated column, "Twix 12 and 20," written for teenagers is featured in the *Seattle Times*, Seattle, Wash. The column distributed by the Copley News Service, is written by Robert Wallace.

Until a year and half ago when the economy caused the paper's space to be tightened and the page was dropped, the *Seattle Times* ran a full broadsheet page on Saturdays called "Junior Times." It started in February of 1980 and included stories and participatory activities for children through the early teens.

"We run an awful lot of activities, listings of things to do and we will do seasonal ones, too, a summer go-and-do type of thing we are careful to put in lots of things for children and families," said June Almquist, assistant managing editor for administration.

"I could say in general the paper does not do enough for children," she said.

Cyndi Meagher, assistant managing editor/Sunday of the *Seattle Times*, said the newspaper covers rock stars, video games, concerts and young peoples' fashion in the news and features sections.

Also, she said stories this spring included many pieces about teenaged drunken drivers and what parents were doing to make safe graduation parties.

18

Lifestyle section is a place to experiment

By MIKE FINNEY
Minneapolis Tribune

Lifestyle sections have been a forum for innovation during the past decade, and the results have been impressive for their usefulness, scope, attractiveness and general quality.

Today the efforts at various lifestyle sections are diverse and often seemingly contradictory as they try to provide valuable, important and entertaining information for differing readerships.

Rich Dalton of the *Topeka Capital-Journal* sees lifestyle sections focused on aspects of daily living that are centered primarily on the home and family.

Ann Kellett, lifestyle editor of the *Fort Lauderdale News/Sun Sentinel*, says, "I'm not quite sure, but perhaps lifestyle sections will once again become 'women's sections.' "

Gilbert L. Watson, assistant managing editor for features at the *Baltimore Sun*, says, "We have dropped daily themes. We have moved heavily toward daily immediacy (heavily arts and entertainment emphasis). We are more and more oriented to community events and listings. Community events will surely grow stronger still.

Janet Woods, newsfeatures editor of the *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, says, "Increasingly, the lines between "lifestyle" and "hard news" are becoming blurred, and I'm not at all sure the "What's a lifestyle section?" question has

ever been answered definitively."

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Lifestyle sections are in a position to experiment because they are less tied to the hard news of the day than typical front pages and local sections. That flexibility, combined with an increasingly sophisticated understanding of our readership and advertising needs, has pushed us toward more specialized material aimed at discrete audience segments.

The intrusion of television into the mass market and the demise of the great mass circulation magazines brought the need for specialized coverage. This new direction was emphasized by the phenomenal success of tightly targeted publications in the 1970's and advertisers increasing need for tightly targeted audiences.

tures were essential to keeping them buying the paper.

This includes both features and other useful, regular information.

Bogart said it well in *Public and Press.*

"Aside from the fun, newspapers must leave space for the routine — the miscellany and minutiae that increase the paper's value to the readers and that can always be found in a particular and predictable place."

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The vitality of many lifestyle sections has come from their responses to these challenges and particularly to their responses to the challenge of the changing nature of the family and women's roles in society.

The family with a man working at a

Lifestyle sections are writing more about the issues social changes raise, primarily in the form of newsfeatures and situations and not as hard, breaking news.

We also had to compete with the very preprints which run in our newspapers. To do this many papers improved the quality of their printing equipment, and with this came higher quality printing in news sections. No sections have taken more advantage of this than lifestyle sections.

New lifestyle sections were added to almost half of the papers with circulation of more than 100,000 and to 42 percent of those with circulation of 50,000 to 100,000 in the two years from 1977-79, according to Leo Bogart in *Press and Public.*

The use of audience segmentation research confirmed the danger of relying exclusively on a general approach to readers (and general readership research). Even though regular items like crossword puzzles and sewing columns might have only a small percentage of the readership, if these readers were reading little else in the paper, these features were essential to keeping them buying the paper.

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The vitality of many lifestyle sections has come from their responses to these challenges and particularly to their responses to the challenge of the changing nature of the family and women's roles in society.

The family with a man working at a paid, 8-5 job, a housewife and two children is no longer the norm. Women have moved dramatically into the workforce and now comprise more than half of the people working in America.

This change has led to many more two-income families, more families in which a woman is the head of the household and generally a greater diversity in the structure of families.

Women are thinking differently about themselves. And today, as opposed to a decade ago, working women are regarded more positively than housewives. Women are becoming increasingly better educated and financially independent. They are affecting and being affected by institutions that traditionally have been dominated by the interests of men.

Generally, lifestyle sections are writing more about the issues these changes in society raise, primarily in the form of newsfeatures and situations and not as

hard, breaking news.

"We often follow hard news stories with pieces that tell how these events, issues affect readers' lives and what others are doing to cope with or change them," according to Carole A. McKelvey.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* tries "to write stories that have topicality, timeliness, a high level of interest and are exciting and different. The 'family' contribution is to convey to both sexes insights into how others are living and how they can cope with and improve their own lives." The *Inquirer's* lifestyle section deals with political issues when they "tend to be related to families and morality and mores," according to Robert Greenberg, assistant managing editor.

Lucinda Smith, assistant managing editor, living/arts, of the *Boston Globe* says, "Our mission is pluralistic and our content based on a "special vision" of the world, i.e. the human side, the feeling side. We want to be a break from the rest of the paper, different. We respect the traditionally disenfranchised, children, homemakers, minorities, etc. We are concerned with values and how they are learned and transmitted."

Modern Living Committee 1983

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